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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Thursday, December 23, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CHRISTMAS NUTS, DATES AND FIGS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, Agricultural Economics, and Plant Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Friends, did you ever say something out loud, without meaning to,- perhaps in a public place, just because you had suddenly found the answer to a problem? Well, that's what I did, this morning, on my way to the studio. What I said was "Nuts to you, Anita!" And a man turned around and said, "I beg your pardon?"

I wasn't being slangy in the least, as it happened. If you'll be patient a few minutes, I'll explain. The story is a little involved.

You see, I chose my topic for today's chat because I had been thinking of the Three Wise Men, and the gifts they brought on their camels to Bethlehem. "There must have been dates and figs in those packages," I thought, "and almonds. All those delicacies were grown from very early times in the fertile valleys of the Euphrates and the Tigris. They were highly prized, too. I'm sure I've read that dates, figs, and almonds were all cultivated by the ancient Assyrians as far back as 3000 B.C."

So I gathered up all the reports and other points I could find for my talk on dates, nuts, and figs, and started for the studio. On the way, reflecting on the antiquity of these sweet-meats, and on the Three Wise Men and their gift-laden caravan, my thoughts suddenly leaped to my own Christmas list. And I realized that three names had been absolutely left out! Probably most of you would have taken care of the difficulty nicely with last minute gifts from the kitchen, but that method was not for me this year.

Inspiration came to me when I glanced down at the reports I had in my hand,- prosaic as they might seem under other circumstances. That was when I spoke out loud and said "Nuts to you, Anita!" You see, I really meant it.

The top reports was from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and this is what it said:

"Record crops of almonds, walnuts, filberts, and above average production of pecans are indicated for this year. Almond production in 1937 is expected to be the highest on record - 16,200 tons. The pecan crop is expected to amount to 35,300 tons, and the expected 1937 English walnut production of 59,600 tons is the heaviest on record."

I didn't stop to read any more, but dashed into the first grocery store I came to. I meant to buy nuts - several bags of them. But when I looked around I found some other tempting goodies displayed, and ended up with a box of dates for Helen and a fancy package of figs for Sadie, who comes from Alabama, and misses her garden fig tree. I wonder if Sadie ever heard what Mohammed is credited with saying: "If I should wish a fruit brought to Paradise, it would certainly be the fig."

Small gifts these, you'll say, but all that was necessary for those particular friends. Just a token of my thought of them, where forgetfulness would have hurt. I'm passing the suggestion along for those of you who may need it. And by the way, if you like figures as well as figs, and data as well as dates, I have some more right here. California produced 31,000 tons of figs in 1936, of which 20,000 tons were dried. These are some of the figs on the market now. And the production of the delicate flavored, tender, moist dates in California,- such as the Deglet Noor,- reached a top figure of 3,813 tons. Much of this crop comes to us daintily packed in individual cellophane-wrapped baskets such as I bought for my friend Helen.

I've jotted down a few other notes on dates and figs that may interest you. Did you know that dates were grown for centuries in the hot countries of Africa that border on the Mediterranean, as well as in the valleys east of Arabia? The use of camels enabled the inhabitants of desert oases to exchange their dates for wheat to make bread. Then the Moors brought dates to Spain, between the 5th and 12th centuries.

Figs were produced in every country along the European coast of the Mediterranean, gradually becoming known in Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, and so to Spain. From Spain the two fruits were carried to the New World by Spanish missionaries, and established in gardens wherever the climate was hot and dry enough for them to grow.

But it remained for scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture less than 50 years ago to investigate the possibility of growing figs on a commercial scale in this country. It was some years before the growth requirements of the fruit were fully understood, so that fig-raising in the warm dry climate of Southern California and similar areas became an important American industry.

Then, about the turn of the century, plant scientists also saw the opportunity to grow the date palm in the arid climate and alkaline soil of the Salton Basin of the Colorado Desert in southeastern California, or the Salt River Valley of Arizona. The date palm requires intense heat, excessive dryness of the air, and absence of all rainfall in the growing season. The Arabians had a proverb that said, "The date palm, the queen of trees, must have her feet in running water and her head in the burning sky." In other words, the roots must have water, but no rain must fall on the fruit.

Judging from the latest figures from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the culture and wide distribution of these two fruits is increasing rapidly in this country. Because they are cleanly packed as well as excellent in flavor, sweet-toothed Americans are buying more and more of the choice selected dates and figs, grown in the southwest. So why should not dates and figs, and nuts from our record crop, carry Christmas cheer to our friends this year?

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